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8 June 1965

MEMORANDUM

CONCLUSIONS

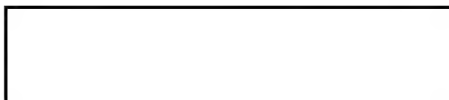
1. The military situation in South Vietnam is indeed very bad, but perhaps not as near to collapse as General Westmoreland suggests.
2. The Communists are less likely to launch an all-out "win the war" offensive this summer than they are to wage their traditional war of attrition and subversion on a significantly increased scale, seeking to defeat the GVN through exhaustion and internal collapse without letting US/GVN forces engage them in decisive battle.
3. It is therefore likely that ARVN will be badly mauled and further depleted by the end of the summer, but we doubt that it will disintegrate or collapse.
4. We are not officially competent to judge General Westmoreland's conclusion that US and third country forces must be rapidly and massively deployed to save the situation. We would point out that such deployment would raise serious political problems in the United States, South Vietnam, and elsewhere. It is questionable whether this alone would be sufficient to achieve ultimate victory.

ARMY review(s) completed.

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DISCUSSION

(The following section is keyed to the numbered paragraphs in General Westmoreland's cable).

1. No comment.

2. Agree. Each year, and particularly each summer, has seen a significant increase in Viet Cong capabilities and intentions in South Vietnam; 1964 and 1965 have been notable for the introduction of North Vietnamese troops and of modern Chinese Communist weapons; more of both are available. North Vietnam's improved aerial warfare capability is primarily defensive and at this point is not a significant factor in the ground war in South Vietnam.

3. Generally agree. There is evidence that elements of a regular PAVN division--the 325th--has infiltrated into northern South Vietnam. While we cannot confirm the presence of the entire division in South Vietnam, there is a sizable communist force in the area which has demonstrated an effectiveness against ARVN forces. This suggests that at least several regular PAVN battalions are in northern South Vietnam and possibly most of the division. As to the 304th division, we are considerably less sure that it has moved from its home base in Thanh Hoa Province of North Vietnam, but we cannot rule this out. There is every indication that the Viet Cong intend to employ their forces as aggressively as possible without incurring serious damage to the integrity of their forces; the 1965 summer offensive, unless seriously interdicted by improved US/GVN tactics, will almost certainly be the most aggressive and widest-ranging yet seen.

4. Agree.

5. Agree.

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6. We are at a disadvantage here because some of General Westmoreland's information, such as deferring 11 new battalions, is new to us. Although we have questioned that force goals would be met, current reporting has consistently indicated a force increase, with weekly goals being met through 5 June. The desertion rate has always been a cause for alarm here; yet the latest MACV weekly summary reports desertions declining in April and in May. Infiltration has in the past been of decisive importance to the Viet Cong side of the balance of forces, but MACV's reporting has been insufficient for us to keep current on these trends. However, new infiltration continues to be reported "negative", despite the fact that a defector's statements on the presence of one full PAVN division are being given serious credence. We have long assumed, from inference, that many ARVN battalions were far below T/O strength. We have repeatedly been told by MACV that ARVN units have been performing much more effectively this year; some contrary examples have been cited, but even in the past week units have stood and fought against overwhelming odds. We are prepared, on the basis of past ARVN performance, to accept General Westmoreland's judgment of the current forces ratios and trends.

7. No comment required.

8. General Westmoreland has to be the judge of the forces he needs to cope with the situation, but we would point out that the DRV--and ultimately China--can readily match our troop build-up. The communists are less likely to launch an all-out "win the war" offensive this summer than they are to wage their traditional war of attrition and subversion on a significantly increased scale, seeking to defeat the GVN through exhaustion and internal collapse without letting US/GVN forces engage them in decisive battle. Although we cannot rule out the use of North Vietnamese airpower against South Vietnam, and we think General Westmoreland is prudent to take this into account, the current pattern of DRV air operations indicates that an air attack in the immediate future is unlikely.

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9. We are forced to point out that, man-for-man, the Viet Cong will for some time have certain advantages over US soldiers and marines, particularly in their adaptation to local conditions and terrain.

IMPLICATIONS: General Westmoreland's judgment in paragraph 8 that force ratios have continued to change in favor of the Viet Cong means in essence that past measures to arrest this trend have not succeeded. This has serious implications for ARVN's future as an effective fighting force. Some, but by no means all, of the questions which need to be addressed before acting on General Westmoreland's recommendations are:

1. What are the immediate and eventual effects of ARVN's deterioration, as described by General Westmoreland, on the Saigon political situation, and vice versa?

2. Can the ARVN deterioration be arrested by the introduction of further foreign forces? At what stage will the US have taken over the war?

3. What happens if the GVN invites us out? Can we prevent this? Do we want to?

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